

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A flexible endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft inseparably incorporating an image-carrying component or image guide, said insertion shaft being formed with an outer surface having at least one longitudinally extending channel having a first transverse dimension or diameter, said channel having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface, said slot having a second transverse dimension or width, said second transverse dimension or width being smaller than said first transverse dimension or diameter, further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close said slot, said insertion shaft being formed with a pair of opposing edges along said slot, said closure member being removably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges, said closure member being an elongate strip removably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges, at least one of said closure member and said insertion shaft being provided with a groove, the other of said closure member and said insertion shaft being insertable into said groove to removably attach said closure member to said insertion shaft.

2. (canceled)

3. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said channel has a distal end opening and proximal end opening, said slot extending from said distal end opening to said proximal end opening, said closure member closing said slot while maintaining said distal end opening and said proximal end opening unobstructed.

4-9. (canceled)

10. (currently amended) A flexible endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft inseparably incorporating an image-carrying component or image guide, said insertion shaft being formed along an outer surface with at least one longitudinally extending channel having a first transverse dimension or diameter, said channel having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface, said slot having a second transverse dimension or width, said second transverse dimension or width being smaller than said first transverse dimension or diameter, further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close said slot, said insertion shaft being formed with a pair of opposing edges along said slot, said closure member being removably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges, said closure member being slidably connected to said insertion shaft, said closure member being provided with an entrainment element for facilitating manipulation of said closure member to slide said closure member along said slot, said entrainment member being a pull tab.

11. (canceled)

12. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 1, further comprising a catheter disposed in said channel.

13. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 12 wherein said closure member is disposed over said channel and said catheter.

14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) A flexible endoscope assembly comprising:

a flexible elongate insertion shaft inseparably incorporating an image-carrying component or image guide, said insertion shaft being formed with an outer surface having at least one longitudinally extending channel longitudinally traversable by an elongate endoscopic instrument, said channel having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface;

a catheter disposed in said channel; and

at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close said slot, said insertion shaft being formed with a pair of opposing edges along said slot, said closure member being removably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges, said closure member being an elongate strip removably attached to said insertion shaft at said edges, at least one of said closure member and said insertion shaft being provided with a groove, the other of said closure member and said insertion shaft being insertable into said groove to removably attach said closure member to said insertion shaft.

16. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 12 wherein said catheter is provided at a proximal end with connectors for coupling said catheter to a source of irrigation fluid and a source of suction.

17. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein at a proximal end said channel terminates at an entry port bifurcated with respect to and diverging from said shaft, further comprising a biopsy channel liner removably disposed in said channel and extending at a proximal end out of said entry port, an end cap being fitted to said liner at said entry port.

18. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 17 wherein said entry port defines a closed lumen communicating with said channel.

19. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 17 wherein said channel continues open along said entry port.

20. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said channel extends from a proximal end portion of said insertion shaft to a distal tip thereof.

21. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said channel has a mostly circular cross-section divided by said slot, said channel being defined by a surface of said insertion member having a C-shaped cross-section.

22. (withdrawn) A flexible endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft, said insertion shaft being formed with an outer surface having at least one longitudinally extending channel longitudinally traversable by an elongate endoscopic

instrument, said channel having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface,

wherein said channel is a one of a plurality of channels formed along said outer surface of said insertion shaft, said channels being circumferentially spaced from one another, each of said channels having a longitudinally extending slot through said outer surface,

further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close at least one of the slots, said closure member being a web member provided with an embedded tensile element for enabling a severing of said web member in preparation for removal of said web member from said endoscope insertion member, said web member being a rectangular sheet provided in a region along a longitudinal edge with a layer of adhesive material to enable a fastening of said sheet to the endoscope insertion member upon a wrapping of the sheet completely about the endoscope insertion member.

23. (withdrawn) The endoscope defined in claim 1, further comprising a sheath disposed about said insertion shaft.

24. (withdrawn) An endoscope assembly comprising an elongate flexible endoscope insertion member provided with at least one channel along an outer cylindrical surface, said channel being open along said surface, said channel having a mostly circular cross-section divided by a slot, said channel being defined by a surface of said insertion member having a C-shaped cross-section with longitudinal edges defining said slot being

turned in and extending towards one another, further comprising at least one closure member removably connected to said insertion shaft to close said slot, said closure member being a web member provided with an embedded tensile element for enabling a severing of said web member in preparation for removal of said web member from said endoscope insertion member, said web member being a rectangular sheet provided in a region along a longitudinal edge with a layer of adhesive material to enable a fastening of said sheet to the endoscope insertion member upon a wrapping of the sheet completely about the endoscope insertion member.

25. (canceled)

26. (canceled)

27. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 24, further comprising a catheter removably disposable in said channel.

28. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein said catheter is separate from and independent of said sheath.

29. (canceled)

30. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said closure member is slidably connected to said insertion shaft, said closure member being provided

with an entrainment element for facilitating manipulation of said closure member to slide said closure member along said slot.

31. (original) The endoscope defined in claim 30, wherein said entrainment member is a pull tab.

32. (canceled)

33. (canceled)

34. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein at a proximal end said channel terminates at an entry port bifurcated with respect to and diverging from said insertion member, said catheter being extendable at a proximal end out of said entry port, an end cap being provided on said catheter.

35. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 34 wherein said entry port defines a closed lumen communicating with said channel.

36. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 34 wherein said channel continues open along said entry port.

37. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein said closure member is disposed over said channel and said catheter.

38. (canceled)

39. (canceled)

40. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 27 wherein said catheter is provided at a proximal end with connectors for coupling said catheter to a source of irrigation fluid and a source of suction.

41. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 24 wherein said channel extends from a proximal end portion of said insertion shaft to a distal tip thereof.

42. (canceled)

43. (withdrawn) The assembly defined in claim 24 wherein said channel is a one of a pair of channels formed along said outer surface of said insertion shaft, said channels being circumferentially spaced from one another.

44. (canceled)

45. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said insertion shaft has a first outer surface and said closure member has a second outer surface, said second outer surface being smoothly continuous with said first outer surface.



46. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 45 wherein said closure member is arcuate in transverse cross-section.

47. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said closure member is attached to said insertion only along said edges of said slot.

48. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said elongate strip is arcuate in transverse cross-section.

49. (previously presented) The endoscope defined in claim 12 wherein said closure member is separate from and independent of said catheter.